



**LEEDS
ARTS RESEARCH
CENTRE**

INSCRIPTION

PROFESSOR SIMON MORRIS

OUTPUT INFORMATION

Title:
Inscription

Output Type:
T – Other

Brief description of type:
Multi-platform project

Year:
2020

Month:
October

Research Groups:
Experimental Publishing
Curating



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION STATEMENT

The first journal dedicated to studying material texts, Inscription combines contributions from artists, printmakers, and writers with academic discussions that shed new light on the codex and writing surfaces in general: from hand-press printing to vapour trails in the sky, from engraved stones to Augmented Reality. Inscription covers a field that hasn't been covered, while embodying that field in its physical form.

Inscription, a cross-platform work that functions as (a) a curated exhibition space for multi-media works, (b) an artist's book and (c) an academic journal for critical discussion surrounding the materiality of text. Morris was solely responsible for the artist's book design concept (rotating format and hole) and selected, commissioned and curated all five artists and writers who made supplementary work for the project. Partington & Smyth selected eight essays from an open call, organised their double-blind peer review and proofed/copy-edited them as well as writing introductions.

Interest from diverse academic institutions has seen the journal bank £10,000 in subscriptions before going to press, its inclusion in Yale's History of the Book programme suggesting it's already seen as a collector's item (also reviewed in The Book Collector). Merging the space of an exhibition context with the discursive space of an academic journal and the impact of an artist's book.

Inscription's dual form – print and internet – echoes the interlacing of physical and virtual that defines how we communicate. It identifies a conceptualism common to literary and visual art, one best suited to the page, here considered in an expanded sense. As Professor Johanna Drucker remarked, 'Inscription and notation – making marks, lines, notes, images – are the foundation of human communication. This is the first journal to make these forms and processes its main area of inquiry, [creating] a vital niche within current discussions around media and information.'

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“The first journal to take the very act of inscribing - making marks, lines, notes, images - as its main area of inquiry. An exciting and timely undertaking.”

Johanna Drucker, Breslauer Professor in Bibliographical Studies and Distinguished Professor, Information Studies, UCLA

"For academics, book artists, printmakers, poets, and artists ... Inscription is rich, exuberant, eye-opening and eye-twisting, and eminently collectible as a work of art in its own right."

Books On Books!

<https://books-on-books.com/2020/10/15/books-on-books-collection-inscription/>

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"Sexiest academic journal ever?"

Dennis Duncan, Lecturer in English at UCL.



"Inscription: the Journal of Material Text - Theory, Practice, History is edited by Simon Morris, Gill Partington and Adam Smyth. Inscription combines imaginative thinking and critical rigour to take the study of material texts in new directions. Inscription is at home equally in the first century and the twenty-first, as well as all points in between, and features work by practitioners – book artists, printmakers and writers – alongside academic discussion, a merger of the theoretical, practical and historical."

D&AD Awards 2021

Shortlist / Magazine & Newspaper Design / Independent Magazines

Inscription: the Journal of Material Text -
Theory, Practice, History
Magazine & Newspaper Design



**D&AD
AWARDS
2021**



Inscription: The Journal of Material Text - Theory, Practice, History



INSCRIPTION: THE JOURNAL OF MATERIAL TEXT – THEORY, PRACTICE, HISTORY

Inscription is an innovative new journal which addresses the theme of the material text from a range of perspectives, bringing together the critical, historical, theoretical and creative. *Inscription* will be at home equally in the first century as the twenty-first and will feature work by practitioners – book artists, printmakers and writers – alongside academic discussion. Its focus is not just on the meanings and uses of the codex book, but also the nature of writing surfaces, the process of mark marking and printing. The journal's theoretically aware, trans-historical and cross-disciplinary remit will break with the conventions of academic ghettoization, creating connections between areas that have much to say to one another – bibliography, the artist's book, and media theory, for instance – enabling more wide-ranging conversation and unexpected juxtapositions. It promises not merely to add to the field but to set new agendas for the next phase of the development of the study of material texts.

In another break with the conventional academic journal, *Inscription's* dos-à-dos format will be equally innovative: inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'A Descent into the Maelstrom', the first half of the journal will be printed in columns, to be read from left to right whilst rotating in a clockwise direction towards the central spine, while the other side of the journal will be rotated 180 degrees, printed in columns from left to right, rotating in a clockwise direction, travelling towards the centre. In effect, the journal has two beginnings and no end. It will also require the reader to rotate it in their hands, in order to read it. The centre fold will be the colophon, laid out in a spiral, with the publishing information disappearing into the gutter. Each edition will have a guest artist-in-residence, poet-in-residence & writer-in-residence; and each edition will be accompanied by a vinyl LP featuring an author reading from their work.

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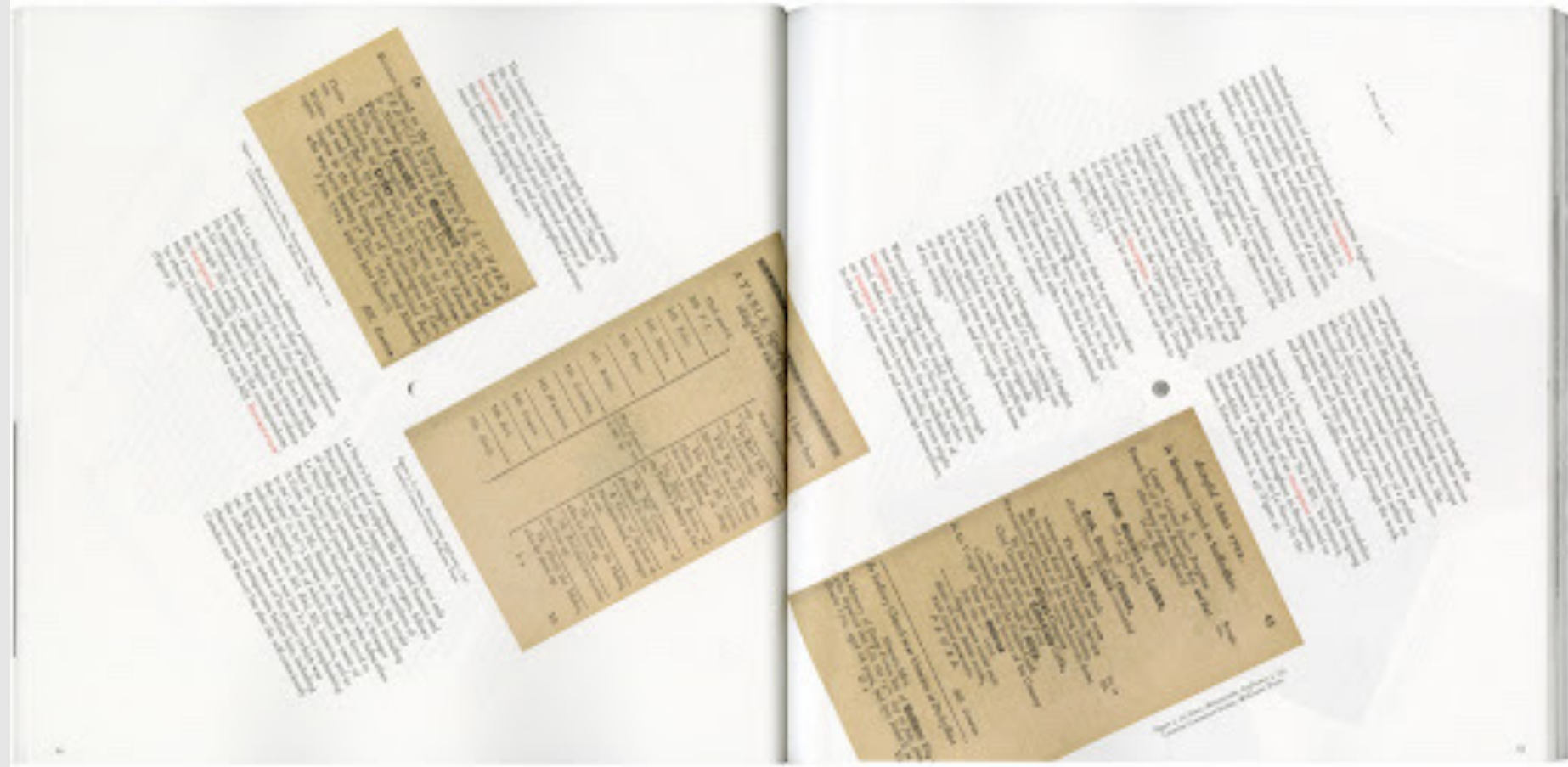


Inscription Vinyl sleeve

Photo credit: Ricky Adam

Inscription page layout

Photo credit: Ricky Adam





Writer in Residence: Sean
Ashton *Living In A Land*

Photo credit: Ricky Adam

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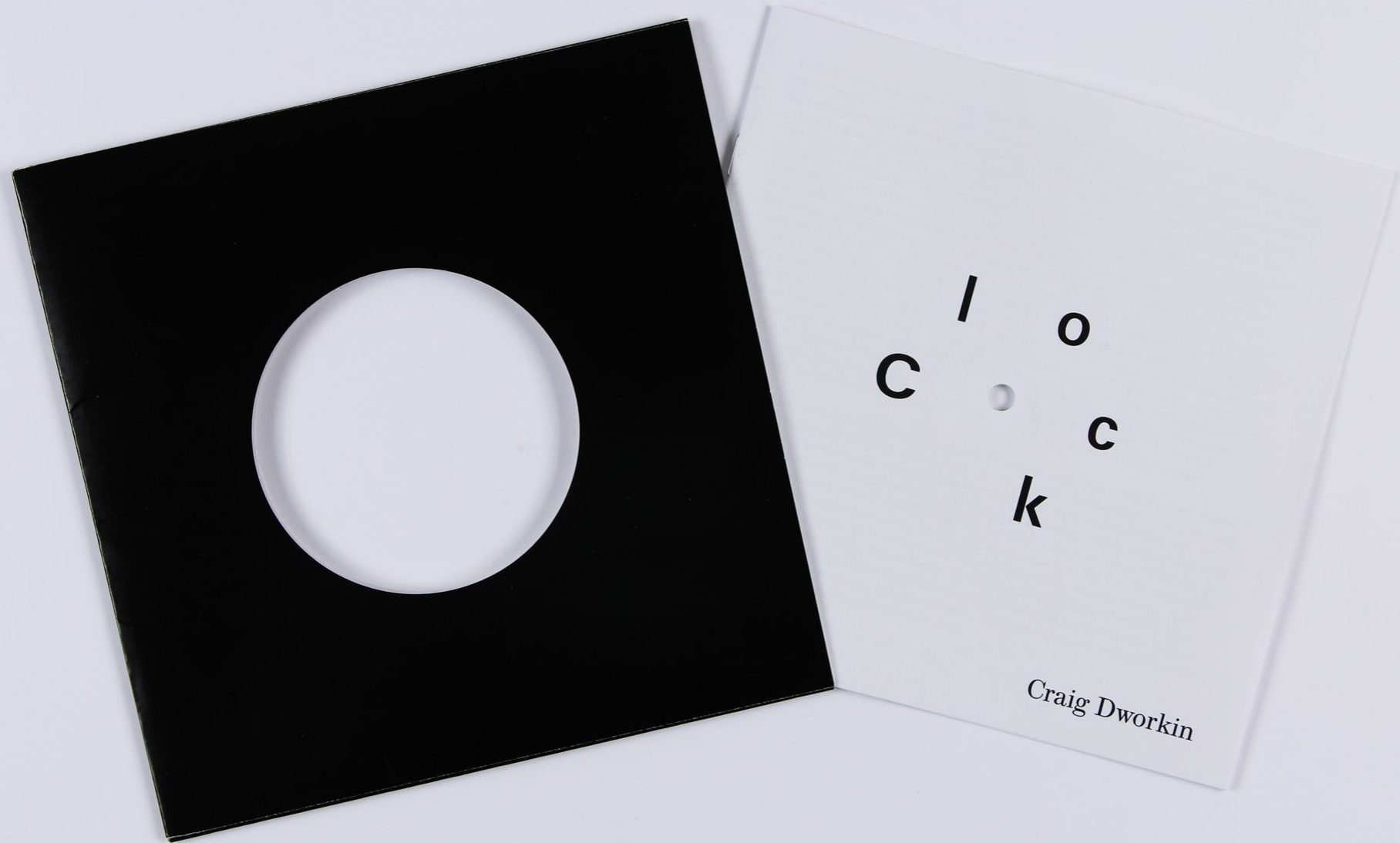


Poet in Residence: Craig
Dworkin *Clock*

Photo credit: Ricky Adam

Poet in Residence: Craig
Dworkin *Clock*

Photo credit: Ricky Adam





Helicoprion, a genus of extinct, shark-like eugeneodontid holoccephalid fish, whorl-toothed, early Permian, approximately 270 million years old. Would have swum in the oceans right above the future site of Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, Utah. Field House of Natural History, Vernal, Utah, USA.

But Captain Howard Stansbury, who knew better, watched the distant Wasatch pass as he piloted, serpentine, his ship counter-clockwise round the lake, at ease in his prime, his personal timepiece to a satchel stashed, the company's chronometers safely placed in their soft-cushioned, velvet-lined case, prepared for the purpose, and always strapped, on the trail, with care in the middle seat of an easy ambulance or spring-wagon, allowed to play freely in the gimbals, with only a sufficient quantity of curled hair placed in rings upon their faces so as to restrict their oscillations within proper limits inside the box, bowing his head again to gaze at the coated rocks and gravel, their semblance a symbol of the waters' stillness, visible beneath the shallows of the lake as if calculating the craft of the movement beneath a beveled crystal, where the pressurized displacement from the passing hull of the *Salicornia* stirred the silt of the lake bed like callis sand – reddish and suspended in the water – eddying into swirls and reverse currents and the counter-curles of vortices unfurling in the surfless, torvid waters with the turbulent, nonlaminar flow regime of the dynamic fluid strata of the salt-chilled thermocline like the calculated cycles and counter-revolutions of cams and nested wheels before resettling with a siren twist, in a rain of pluvial sediment felled beneath the tyrant's fist of gravity like the red alluvium of strife.

If he reversed course with exquisite precision, straking in a perfect backward circle, wake rushing in to meet the stern turned prow, would each grain rise and resettle exactly where it had been, he wondered, lost in thought, absentmindedly smoothing his hair, furrowing his brow, squinting his eyes ... when suddenly, scotomatic, the sun opacified his view with an actinic glare taining the lake into a vertiginous mirror, until he was unable to distinguish light from water – the mirror kept changing places with the reflection and the reflection with its mirror in a structural blindness where all boundaries and distinctions lost their meanings in an ocean of slate, the present falling backward into a petrified sea until the sun has turned to glass and the surface of the water fused in the helium sheen of a thermonuclear crucible of fifteen-million degrees – but looking away for relief offered only the steady erosion of figure and ground, a frictionless glide of purely optical movement across the uninterrupted desert horizon and the sublation of sand to steam, air shimmering in heat, so that he was forced to admit that the crystal is the seat of greater disorder than its parent liquid in a scene where even *to see* becomes an intransitive

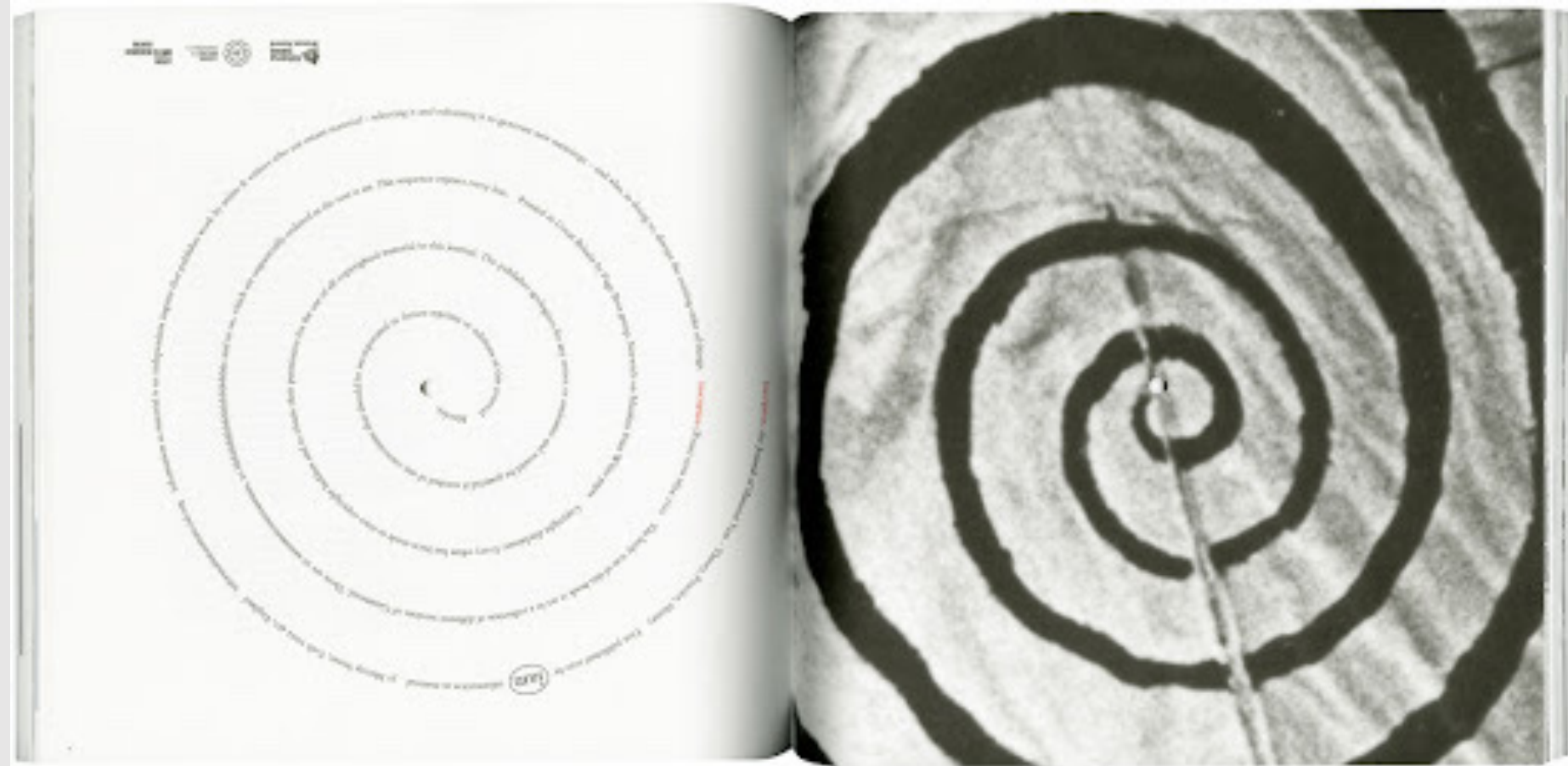
Poet in Residence: Craig
Dworkin *Clock*

Photo credit: Ricky Adam

ground in the distance," resumed the old man, "is called by the Mos-egians Vurgh. The one midway is Moskoe, That a mile to the northward is Ambasen. Yonder are Ilesen, Hothelm, Keildheke, Suarven, and Buckholm. Farther off -- between Moskoe and Vurgh -- are Græsbolum, Flimen, Sandflesen, and Stockholm. These are the true eddies of the sea -- but why it has been thought necessary to name them all is more than either you or I can understand. Do you hear anything of the water? Do you hear I have been about ten minutes upon the top of Helseggen, to which we had sailed from Lofoden, so that we had caught no glimpse of the sea until it had burst upon us from the summit. As the old man spoke, he became aware of a loud and gradually increasing sound, like the moaning of a vast herd of buffaloes upon an American prairie; and at the same moment I perceived that what seemed term the chopping chop of the ocean beneath us, was rapidly changing into a current which set to the eastward. Even while I gazed, this current acquired a tremendous velocity. Each moment added to its speed -- to its headlong impetuosity. In five minutes the whole face of the sea, which before had appeared so unobscurely flat; but it was between Moskoe and the coast that the current first showed itself. Here the vast bed of the waters, seamed and scarred into a thousand conflicting channels, burst suddenly into phrenzied convulsion -- heaving, boiling, hissing -- gyrating in gigantic and unmeasurable whirls, and whirling and surging to the eastward with a rapidity which water never elsewhere assumes except in preternatural violence. In a few minutes more, there came over the scene another radical alteration. The general surface grew smoother, more smooth, and the whirlpools, one by one, disappeared, while prodigious masses of foam, white as snow and as dense as lead before, rose up in the air. These swells, at length, spreading out to a great distance, and entering into circles, took unto themselves the gyratory motion of the subsided vortices, and seemed to form the ground of another more vast. Suddenly -- very suddenly -- this assumed a distinct and definite character. It was a black wall of water, inclined to the horizon at an angle of some forty-five degrees, and rising lazily round and round with a swaying and sweltering motion, and yet open both to the winds on appalling voice, half shriek, half roar, such as I never heard from the mighty cataract of Niagara ever lifts up in its agony to Heaven. The mountain trembled from its base, and the rock rocked. I threw myself upon my face, and clung to the side of the ledge in an excess of nervous agitation. "This," said I at length, to the old man, "can be nothing else than the great whirlpool of the Maelström." "So the seamen termed," said he. "We Norwegians call it the Moskoe-ström, from the island of Moskoe in the midway." The ordinary accounts of this vortex had by now become so confused in my mind, that I could not tell what I saw. That of Jonas Ramus, which is perhaps the most circumstantial of any, made almost the faintest conception either of the magnificence, or of the horror, of the scene -- or of the wild bewildering sense of the novel which confounds the beholder. I am not sure from what point of view the writer in question surveys the phenomenon; but it could neither have been from the summit of Helseggen, nor during a storm. There are some passages of his description, nevertheless, which may be quoted for their details, although their effect is exceedingly feeble in conveying an impression of reality. "Between Lofoden and Moskoe," he says, "the depth of the channel is seven thirty-six and forty fathoms; -- but on the other side, toward Vurgh) this depth decreases so as not to afford convenient passage for a vessel, without the risk of splitting on the rocks, which happens even in the calmest weather. When it is flood, the currents sweep the country between Lofoden and Moskoe with a boisterous fury, and the roar of the sea's impetuous ebb to the sea is scarce equalled by the loudest and most dreadful cataracts; -- the noise being heard several leagues off, and the vortices or pits are of such extent and depth, that if a ship comes within its attraction, it is inevitably carried down and carried down to the bottom, and there beat to pieces against the rocks, and when the water relaxes, the fragments thereof are thrown up again. But these intervals of tranquillity are only at the turn of the fresh and flood, and in calm weather, and last but a quarter of each tide, the turbulence gradually returning. When the stream is most violent, the waves and its fury heightened by a storm, it is dangerous to come ashore less than five miles off. Boats, yachts, and ships have been carried away by not guarding against it before they were within its reach. It likewise happens frequently, that whales come too near the stream, and are compelled by its violence; and then it is impossible to describe the howlings and bellows in their fruitless struggles to draw back, or escape. A hour once, attempting to swim from Lofoden to Moskoe, was caught by the stream and borne down, while he roared terribly, so as to be heard six hours. Large stocks of fire and pine trees, after being elevated by the current, rise again broken and torn to shreds, and the bristles grew upon them. This plainly shows the bottom of the straits is strewed with jagged and sharp rocks, among which they are whirled to and fro. This stream is regulated by the flux and reflux of the sea -- it being constantly high and low water every six hours. In the year 1645, early in the morning of Sunday, the 20th of June, it raged with such noise and fury, that the very stones of the houses on the coast fell to the ground. Compared to the depth of the water, I could not see how this could have been ascertained at all in the immediate vicinity of the vortex. The "forty fathoms" must have referred only to portions of the channel close upon the shore either of Moskoe or Lofoden. The depth in the middle of the Moskoe-ström must be immeasurably greater; and not far from this fact is necessary that can be obtained from even the sidelong glance into the abyss of the whirl which may be had from the highest crag of Helseggen, looking down from this pinnacle upon the howling Phlegæthon below, would not help smiling at the simplicity with which the honest Jonas Ramus records, as a matter difficult of belief, the anecdotes of the whales and the bears; for it appeared to me, in fact, a self-evident thing, that the largest ship of the line in existence, coming within the influence of this deadly attraction, could resist it as little as a feather the hurricane, and must disappear bodily ere it were seen. He attempts to account for the phenomenon -- some of which he, however, seemed to me sufficiently plausible in person -- now were a very different and unsatisfactory aspect. The idea generally received is that this, as well as three smaller tides along the Færøe islands, "have no other cause than the collision of waves rising and falling, and reflux, against a ridge of rocks and shelves, which causes the water so that it precipitates itself like a cataract; and from the higher the descent, the deeper runs the fall, and the natural result of all is a whirlpool or vortex, the prodigious action of which is sufficiently known by lesser circumstances." -- These are the words of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*. Kircher and others imagine that in the centre of the channel of the Maelström is an abyss permeating the globe, and having its secondary vent, the Gulf of Bothnia being somewhat decidedly named in one instance. This opinion, idle in itself, was the one to which, as I gazed, my imagination most readily assented; and, mentioning it to the guide, I was rather surprised to find him say that, although it was the view almost universally entertained of the subject by the Norwegians, it nevertheless was not true. As to the former notion he confessed his inability to comprehend it; and here I agreed with him -- for, however much I scribble on paper, it becomes altogether unintelligible, and even absurd, amid the thunder of the waves. "You have had a good look at the whirl now," said the old man, "and if you will creep round this crag, so as to get in its lee, and stand near the rear of the water, I will tell you a story that will convince you I ought to know something of the Moskoe-ström." I placed myself as desired, and he proceeded. "Myself and my two brothers came once, in a schooner-rigged smack of about seventy tons burthen, with which we were in the habit of fishing among the islands beyond Moskoe, toward Vurgh. In all violent eddies at sea there is good fishing, at proper opportunities, if one has only the courage to attempt it, but among the whale of the Lofoden coastmen, we three were the only ones who made a regular business of going out to the islands, as I told you. The usual grounds are a great way lower down to the southward. There fish can be got all hours, without much risk, and therefore their places are preferred. The choice spots over here among the rocks, however, not only yield the finest variety, but in far greater abundance; -- so that we often got in a single day, what the more timid craft could not scrape together in a week. In fact, we made it a matter of desperate speculation -- the risk of life standing instead of labor, and therefore, our chances were for capital. "We kept the smack in a cove about five miles higher up the coast than this; and it was our practice, in fine weather, to take advantage of the fifteen minutes slack, which occurs across the main channel of the Moskoe-ström, far above the pool, and then drop down upon anchor somewhere near Otterholm, or Sandflesen, where the eddies are not so violent as elsewhere. Here we used to remain until nearly time for slack-water again, when we weighed and stood to home. We never set out upon this expedition without a steady side wind for going and coming -- one that we felt sure would not fail us before our return -- and we always made a mis-calculation upon this point. Twice, during six years, we were forced to stay all night at anchor on account of a dead calm, which is a rare thing indeed just about this place; and once we had to remain on the ground nearly a week, starving to death, owing to a gale which blew up shortly after our arrival, and made the channel too deep for us to be thought of. Upon this occasion we should have been driven out to sea in spite of everything, for the whirlpools threw us round and round so violently, that, at length, we could our anchor and dragged it) if it had not been that we drifted into one of the innumerable cross currents -- here to lay and gone to-morrow -- which drove us up the lee of Flimen, where, by good luck, we brought up. I could not tell you the twentieth part of the difficulties we encountered 'on the grounds' -- it is a bad spot to be in, even in good weather -- but we made shift always to brave the gauntlet of the Moskoe-ström itself without serious mishap, although at times my heart has been in my mouth when we were bound to be a minute or so behind or before the slack. The wind sometimes was not as strong as we thought it at starting, and then we made rather less way than we expected, while the current rendered the rush more manageable. My eldest brother had a son eight years old, and I had two stout boys of my own. These would have been of great assistance at such times, in using the sweeps, as well as of aid upward in fishing -- but, somehow, although we were so risk ourselves, we had not the heart to let the young ones get into the danger -- for, after all is said and done, it was a horrible danger, and thus it was the truth. "It is now within a few days of three years since what I am going to tell you occurred. It was on the tenth day of July, 18__ , a day which the people of this part of the world will never forget, for it was one in which blew the most terrible hurricane that ever came out of the heavens. And yet all the morning, and indeed until late in the afternoon, there was a gentle and steady breeze from the southwest, while the sun shone brightly, so that the oldest seaman among us could not have foreseen what was to follow. The three of us -- my two brothers and myself -- had crossed over to the islands about two o'clock P. M., and had soon nearly landed in a smack with fine fish, which we remarked, were more plenty that day than we had ever known them. It was just seven, by my watch, when we weighed and started for home, so as to reach the worst of the Ström at slack water, which we knew would be at eight. "We set out with a fresh wind and a fairboard quarter, and for some time passed along at a great rate, never dreaming of danger, for indeed we saw not the slightest reason to apprehend it. All at once we were taken aback by a breeze from over Helseggen. This was most unusual -- something that had never happened to us before -- and I began to feel a little uneasy, without knowing why. We put the boat on the wind, and could make no headway at all for the eddies, and I was upon the point of proposing to return to the anchorage. When, looking astern, we saw the whole horizon covered with a singular copper-colored cloud that rose with the most amazing velocity. "In the meantime the breeze that had headed us died away, and we were dead becalmed, drifting about in every direction. This state of things, however, did not last long enough to give us time to think about it. In less than a minute the storm was upon us -- in less than two the sky was entirely obscured, and what with this and the driving spray, it became suddenly so dark that we could not see one another in the smack. "Such a hurricane as this does it is folly to attempt describing. The oldest seaman in Norway never experienced any thing like it. We had for our sails go by the run before us, clearly took us; but, at the first puff, both our masts went by the board as if they had been sawed off -- the mainmast taking with it my youngest brother, and he dashed himself to his safety. "Our boat was the lightest piece of a dingy that ever sat upon water. I had a complete flush-deck, with only a small hatch near the bow, and this hatch it had always been our custom to batten down when about to enter the Ström, by way of precaution against the chopping seas. But for this circumstance we should have foundered at once -- for we lay entirely bare for some moments. How my elder brother escaped I cannot say, for I never had an opportunity of ascertaining. For my part, as soon as I had let the foresail run, I threw myself flat on deck, with my feet against the narrow gunwale of the bow, and with my hands grapping a ringbolt near the foot of the fore-mast. It was mere instant death-gripping me to do this -- which was undoubtedly the best thing I could have done -- for I was too much flustered to try. "For some moments we were completely deluged, as I say, and all four of us held my breath, and clung to the bolt. When I came so as to see what was to be done, when I saw somebody grasp my arm. It was my elder brother, and my heart leaped with joy, for I had made sure that he was overboard -- but the next moment all this joy was turned into horror -- for he put his mouth close to my ear, and screamed out the word 'Moskoe-ström!' "No one ever will know what my feelings were at that moment. I shook from head to foot as if I had had the most violent fit of the spasms. I knew what he meant, and that one word well enough -- I knew what he wished to make me understand. With the wind that now drove us on, we were blown for the whirl of the Ström, and nothing could we avoid. "You perceive that in crossing the Ström channel, we always went a long way up above the whirl, even in the calmest weather, and thus I had to wait and watch carefully for the slack -- but now we were diving right upon the pool itself, and in such a hurricane as this! "To be sure," I thought, "we shall get there just about the slack -- there is some little hope in that" -- but in the next moment I cursed myself for being so good a fool as to depend on hope at all. I knew very well that we were doomed, had we been ten times a ninety-gun ship. By this time the first fury of the tempest had spent itself, or perhaps we did not feel it so much, as we scudded before it, but at all events the seas, which I had been kept down by the wind, and lay flat and frothing, now got up into absolute mountains. A singular change, too, had come over the heavens. Around in every direction it was still as black-as-pitch, but nearly overhead there burst out, at all once, a circular rift of clear sky -- as clear as I ever saw -- and of a deep bright blue -- and through there blazed forth the full moon with a lustre that I never before knew her to wear. She lit up every thing about us with the greatest distinctness. Just oh God, what a sight it was to light up! I now made one or two attempts to speak to my brother -- but, in some manner which I could not understand, the din had so increased that I could not make him hear a single word, although I screamed at the top of my voice in his ear. Presently he shook his head, looking as pale as death, and held up the finger, as if to say, "listen!" At first I could not make out what he meant it -- but soon a hideous thought flashed upon me. I dragged my watch from its fob. It was not going. I glanced at its face by the moonlight, and then burst into tears as I flung it far away into the ocean. It had run down at the very clock! We were behind the time of the slack, and the finger of the Sun was in full fury! "When a boat is well built, properly trimmed, and not deep laden

Inscription page layout

Photo credit: Ricky Adam



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